

ONLY PHOTO EVER TAKEN OF A MERMAID

STRANGE VISITOR IN WILLAMETTE WATERS
POSES FOR AN OREGONIAN ARTIST

SUPPOSE that you had just crossed to Albina by the ferry, and that you were walking along the river. Suppose you saw a girl in the water, supporting herself without apparent effort and combing her golden hair with a comb of pearl. What would you do?

All I did was to say, "Well, I'll be Jim-digged!"—a word that I had invented for the occasion, as none other seemed appropriate. Waves were blowing in some of the garden, but a cold wind was blowing also, and this made it seem more extraordinary than ever that a girl should select the river as a dressing-room. I was not only Jim-digged, but flabbergasted.

"Anything the matter with my hair?"

complacently asked the girl, as she observed my involuntary stare.

with the air of one seeking news of a schoolmate.

"Quite a long time now," answered the girl. "I have been in California waters for several years, and the old man spends most of his time in the Mediterranean."

"What do you mean?" I questioned, "by saying you have been 'in California waters'?" I haven't been much in California waters myself, but a good many quarts of California waters have been in me—I drink 'em for my health."

"Why," answered the girl, "where should a mermaid be, if not in the water?"

A mermaid! There were even more mice in her attic than I had thought.

"Sure," I managed to say, "were the water is the place for mermaids."

would be guilty of. We have police in all the river towns."

"Dear me, I had no idea Miss Lorelei was a girl of that kind," said Elma—that was her name, she told me—after St. Elmo. "I must get back to the sea."

By this time I was convinced that Elma was a really truly mermaid. It seemed strange, but I had to believe it. Ships were being loaded and unloaded at the docks; the matter-of-fact city was going about its business; and here was a mermaid within its limits. Such an opportunity might never come again. "Wait a moment, Emma," I cried, and ran for the nearest telephone. I rang up The Oregonian office, and in a few seconds Lute Pease was on his way to the ferry with a camera. We would have the first

Mathoma pulling snags up the river. One of them had a lot of thick roots and branches, and as it came to the top I saw some one caught between two shoots. First, I thought it was a dead body, but it moved, and then I didn't know what the whatyoucallit thing could be. The men on the Mathoma thought it was the devil, and one was going to heave a stick of wood at it, when I hollered. I took the thing off in my boat, and then I saw 'twas a mermaid. My grandfather used to tell me he saw lots of them in the South Sea Islands when he was a sailor, and I recognized the looks of it. I brought her down here, and I'm going to keep her in a pond until I can sell her. I have to go home now and fix things with my wife. And off the old man trotted. A bit wob-

bled on his feet he was, too, having, I thought, been celebrating his capture in the Rabbit saloon.

"If you don't believe me," the old chap shouted back over his shoulder, "there was a fellow on the bank what took a snapshot of the snag and me in my boat. He's going to send it to The Oregonian."

"Well," thought I, "we'll have one photograph, anyway, even if Elma has skipped." But she was there when I got back, and singing—as mermaids are supposed to be always doing.

How fine to be a mermaid. To go to all the dances. And have no one tread on your toes!

"Are you not afraid of catching cold and spoiling your voice?" I asked.

"I can't get wet feet, you know," said Elma.

"Or cold feet, either?"

"Only when Neptune calls us down."

"And even he can't make you too the line."

"Well," said Elma, "I don't have to bother with skirts, anyway."

"That's true," said I, and then I asked Elma if she would pose for a photograph.

"I've had lots of drawings made," she replied, "but I'm simply dying to be photographed. I'll put a copy in my portfolio, and the others will be as jealous as can be."

"Here comes the artist," said I, as Mr. Pease hove in sight. But the artist, having caught sight of Elma, stopped and beckoned to me. When I reached his side, he took me by the arm. "We'll have to be careful," he said. "We'll have to be careful of what?" said I.

"Why," said he, "have you forgotten that this is leap year?"

"That's all right," I assured him. "Elma's a mermaid."

"Yes," he assented, "but she may think a webfoot is closely enough related."

Several photographs having been taken, the camera was stowed away, and the artist began to engage Elma in animated conversation. "Don't forget," I murmured, "that it's leap year."

"This is purely an artistic conversation," he responded. "It's not every day I get the chance of studying such a fine model."

It wasn't long until I heard Elma ask the artist in a very audible tone, "How many did you say was company?"

This was pretty nice treatment from a

her hair as it trailed out behind her like a flicker of sunshine on the water.

And a photograph is all we have to recall the only mermaid that ever visited Portland. The artist has a comb of pearl, which, he says, was given him by Elma, but I think he bought it in a store.

As for the boatman, he celebrated so much that he got the Jim-jama, and to this day he's not quite sure whether he ever saw a mermaid or not.

WEXFORD JONES.

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"All right," I said, with some bitterness and hiked off to find if Portland was such a wide-open town that mermaids might inveigle our artists into deep-sea elopements. I had scarcely reached the ferry when I bumped into a police commissioner.

"I want to show you something that looks a bit fishy," said I.

The commissioner came along.

"There!" said I.

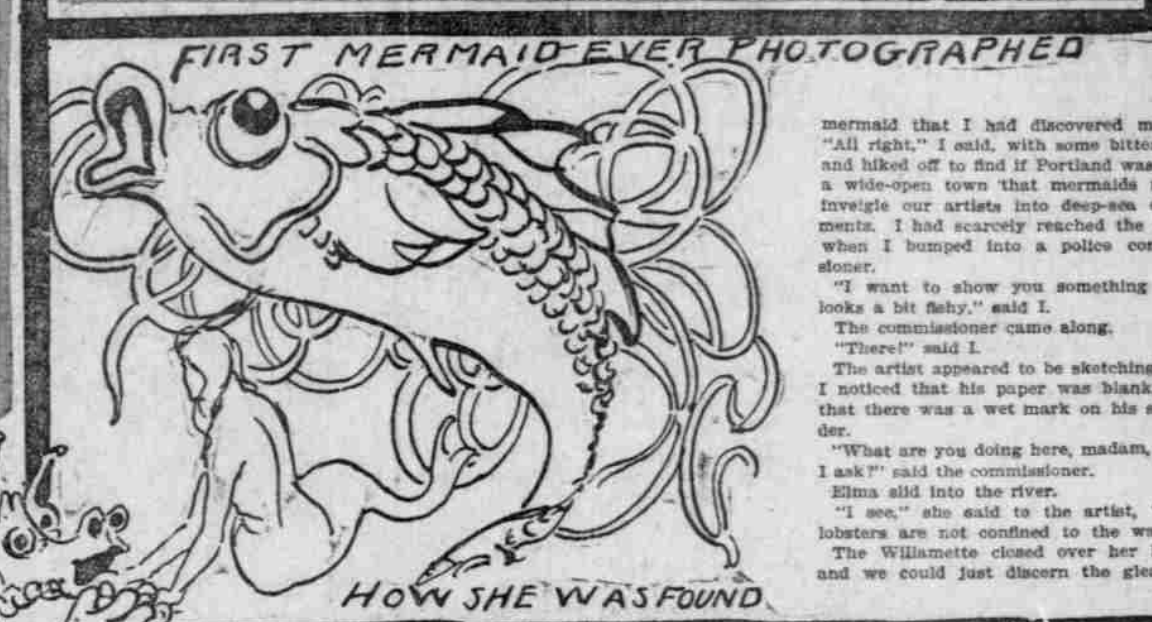
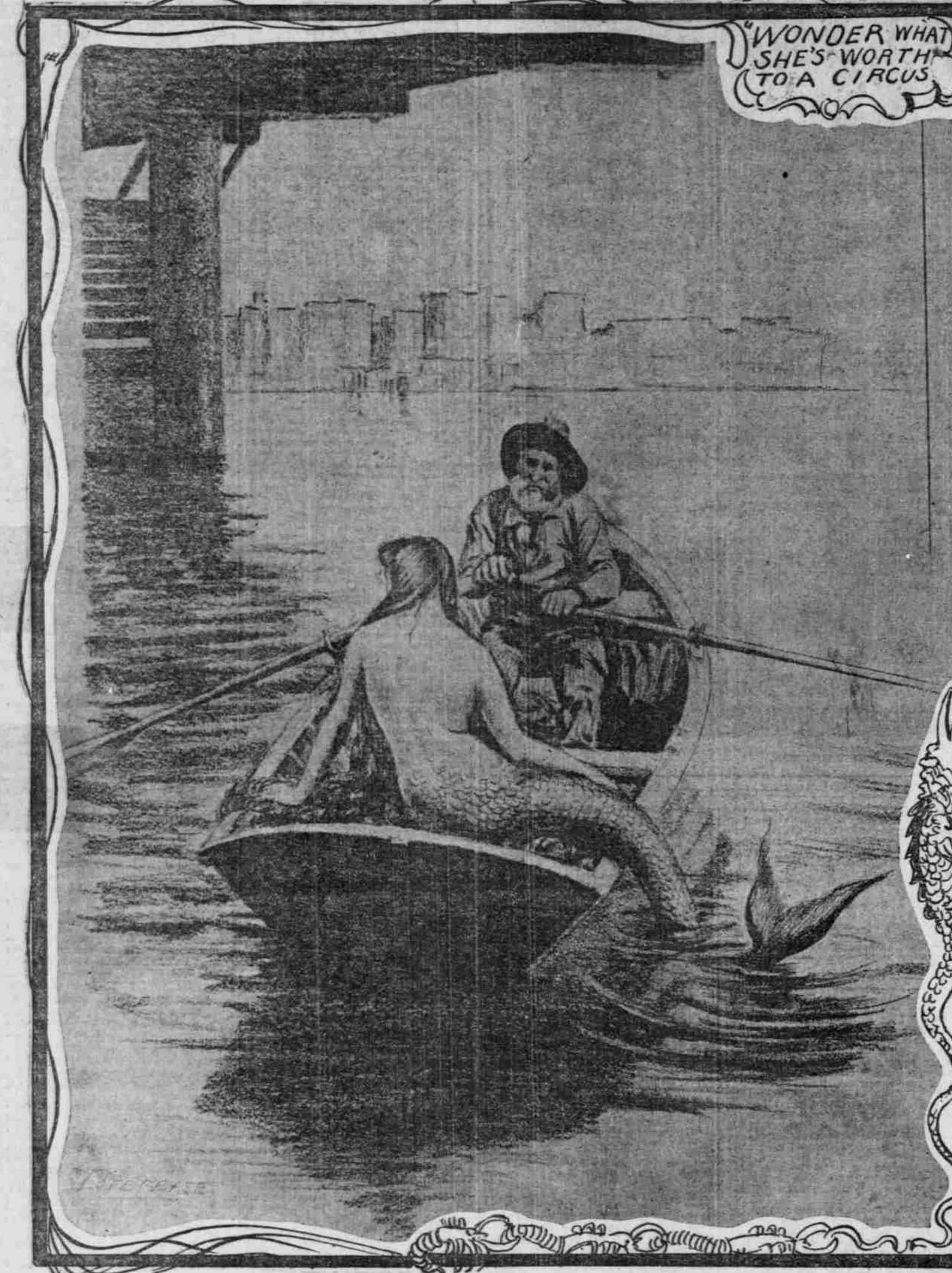
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"No, indeed," said I; "it's the finest I have ever seen."

The girl seemed quite pleased. "That's what Neptune tells me," she answered.

"Who is Neptune?" I asked—"a dog?"

"Neptune," the girl replied poutingly, "is the King of the ocean."

"A friend of yours?" I gasped.

"Sure, Mike," was the answer.

Then I tumbled. The poor girl had escaped from Salem. She was nuts. It was my duty to see that she didn't drown herself, and to call upon the first boatman that passed to pull her out of the water. I would humor the beautiful lunatic.

"Long since you saw Nep?" I asked.

The girl wriggled farther up on the wharf, and, if I could believe my eyes, she was a mermaid. All I could remember learning about mermaids was that they had golden hair, sea-green eyes and ended up in a sort of skin-fitting skirt of scales. This creature answered the description to a "t."

"But mermaids don't live in rivers," I objected, after a moment's thought.

"I'm just on a visit," the creature replied. "I thought I might find a lorelei cousin in the Willamette."

"Never," said I. "The Willamette is entirely too placid for any such people, and, besides, Oregonians wouldn't stand for any such carryings-on as your lorelei"

patron saint of the entire region. Old divers say that when they look down into the waters of the stream they can see "Old Hutton" sitting quietly on the bottom gathering pearl-bearing mussels as of yore. The old man's bones are high up on the foothills in the little burying-ground, but his spirit is believed still to point out to the divers the best spots for pearl fishing.

The aged Englishman first told the natives how to get the pearls, and then imparted the great secret of their value. The result is that hundreds of families in Tennessee have been lifted from poverty to wealth.

Pearl fishing in the Clinch River is a big gamble. A man may go through boatloads of mussels for weeks without finding a single pearl, and then he may stumble on a big one worth \$200 or more. A young man named Clint dived to the bottom of the deepest hole in the Clinch River recently and brought up only one mussel. But it contained a pearl which he sold for \$200.

The hunting and collecting of pearls in this country has developed into a steady business, which is good for nine months

in the year, the thousands of pearls gathered finding a ready market in New York City and in European centers.

Experiments are now being made in this country and elsewhere in the curious business of growing pearls.

The Chinese have long practiced a queer method of gently opening a live mussel, placing a tiny speck of some hard substance in the viscera and then feeding the mussel and keeping it healthy until the pearl develops. In the effort of nature to render the speck harmless, the mussel deposits a salivaceous substance that hardens and grows, and thus the pearl forms. The pearl which grows around the slight wound or irritation keeps on increasing in size for several years. The difficulty is to know what sort of food to give the mussel in order to produce the most brilliant "Oriental" hues.

The American experiments are along these lines, and if they are successful the pearl divers of tropical waters will be put out of business. They will not be able to compete with the artificial product, and the shark will know them no more.

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"Your mermaid?" I exclaimed.

"You haven't got one as well," he cried in a disappointed tone.

"I left one sitting on the wharf," I replied.

"Oh, that's mine," said the boatman, evidently relieved. "How much do you think the Ringlings will give for her?"

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THE GROWTH OF AMERICA'S PEARL-FISHING INDUSTRY

WITHIN the past five years a large pearl-fishing industry has grown up in the United States, but it has none of the tragedy or romance of the Ceylon and Panama fisheries. It centers principally around the Clinch River, in Tennessee, and there are smaller fisheries in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

The Clinch River pearls are not found in oysters, but in mussels, and they are fished for in a queer way. Scores of men and boys may be seen there every day, hanging down into the dark waters of the river and clinging by their toes to the gunwales of shallow scowboats. They swim under water for a minute or two, practically standing on their heads, and then come up with a double handful of mussels. Even women take part in this queer fishery.

An Englishman known as "Old Hutton" found the first pearl in Clinch River 20 years ago. Naturally, his memory is held in great respect by the people to whom he showed the way to wealth.

He was gathered to his fathers long ago, but he is still looked upon as the

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